



Indiana State Board of Education

Room 225 State House
Indianapolis, Indiana 46204-2798
317-232-6622

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An Open Letter to Indiana Educators about Textbooks, Computers and Instructional Materials

Indiana's students deserve effective instructional materials from which they can learn. This applies both to content and to format.

Content: Engaging Student Interest in Social Studies

As we noted in our [Statement and Action Regarding Social Studies Textbooks](#), taken as a group we perceive that many of the available social studies textbooks do not provide content that is interesting, engaging and supportive of effective and interested student learning. There are exceptions: we can identify, for example, an individual social studies text written to tell the story of the United States in a manner conducive to student interest rather than a lengthy amalgamation of facts for memorization.

But as a board we have expressed our concern that the now standardized form of social studies textbooks – jammed full of facts without interesting prose, racing through data without telling the story (good and bad) of our country – may jeopardize both student interest in history as a subject and the effective learning of the country's principles and values as a predicate to participating as a citizen of our nation.

You should feel no obligation to utilize the standard form of social studies textbooks. To the contrary, we urge schools to move cautiously and not adopt social studies textbooks without giving thought to what book or other instructional materials can best help bring social studies to life. We continue to encourage local districts and educators to make content decisions that are premised on presenting material that both aligns to the state's subject matter standards and engages students' interests, that detail the complexity of the human experience and elicit richer student consideration of the history, values and principles important to the meaning of America, its past and developing place in the world and the fabric of its culture.

This is critically important in United States history as a foundation element of educating students toward good citizenship. We believe the same principles apply in other curriculum areas as well.

Format: Technology in General

The State Board is required by statute to adopt textbooks for use in the state if they meet very minimal criteria. Yet, after giving its local advisory committee an opportunity to provide its recommendations, [Indiana Code 20-26-12-28](#) gives each school corporation flexibility to request a waiver from textbook adoption requirements if the school board believes that the educational needs of students can best be served by not adopting a textbook or by adopting a textbook that has not been adopted by the State Board.

This provides considerable flexibility because of the broad and inclusive definition of "textbook" in Indiana Code 20-18-2-23:

"Textbook" means systematically organized material designed to provide a specific level of instruction in a subject matter category.

The State Board interprets this section to allow school corporations to use computers and other data devices, instructional software, internet resources, interactive, magnetic and other media, and other “systematically organized material.” As technology continues to evolve, Indiana’s broad and inclusive definition of a textbook will enable districts to evolve in their use of such materials, whether packaged for them or packaged by them.

To simplify the process for obtaining a waiver, the State Board has granted a blanket waiver under its authority to waive certain textbook statutes.

School corporations and accredited nonpublic schools can notify the Department of Education of their actions to take advantage of the blanket waiver by using the form available at www.doe.in.gov/textbook under the “important information” heading.

Rigor must be preserved, and the materials must align with Indiana’s learning standards. But the use of technologically enabled learning materials is fully available to Indiana districts and schools.

Schools also should not hesitate to use computers and other data devices, instructional software, internet resources, interactive, magnetic and other media, and other “systematically organized material” for fear that they will not receive textbook reimbursement for students on free and reduced price lunch. [Indiana Code 20-33-5-7](#), the textbook reimbursement statute, accommodates textbook adoption waivers:

- (c) To be guaranteed some level of [textbook] reimbursement from the department, the governing body of a school corporation shall request the reimbursement before November 1 of a school year.
- (d) In its request, the governing body shall certify to the department:
 - (1) the number of students who are enrolled in that school corporation and who are eligible for assistance under this chapter;
 - (2) the costs incurred by the school corporation in providing:
 - (A) textbooks (including textbooks used in special education and high ability classes) to these students;
 - (B) workbooks and consumable textbooks (including workbooks, consumable textbooks, and other consumable instructional materials that are used in special education and high ability classes) that are used by students for not more than one (1) school year; and
 - (C) instead of the purchase of textbooks, developmentally appropriate material for instruction in kindergarten through the grade 3 level, laboratories, and children’s literature programs;
 - (3) that each textbook described in subdivision (2)(A) and included in the reimbursement request...has been adopted by the state board under IC 20-20-5-1 through IC 20-20-5-4 or has been waived by the state board of education under IC 20-26-12-28....

The definition of “textbook” for purposes of reimbursement is the same definition that applies to adoption. Computers and other data devices, instructional software, internet resources, interactive and magnetic media, and other “systematically organized material” are eligible for reimbursement.

Because computers or other data devices are necessary to deliver the content, the State Board includes them within the definition. School corporations already have been successful in working with vendors to purchase, for example, low cost, content-loaded mini-laptops; others have developed their own materials for use with computers.

Finally, we encourage districts and schools to collaborate to lower the cost of acquisition of textbooks, computers and other data devices, and their content.

The Members of the State Board of Education
Dr. Tony Bennett, Chairman